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THE LESBIA OF CATULLUS

Scholars have accepted as satisfactory the identification of Catullus' Lesbia with the Roman lady Clodia, but as far as I know little significance has been attached to his choice of that particular pseudonym. There were available, of course, a great many names offering metrical equivalents to the name "Clodia"; was it at random that "Lesbia" was chosen?

There is a suggestion in the Baehrens-Schultz edition of Catullus that such names were applied by the poets to their ladyloves as would be in some way appropriate to their personality or character, and the writer goes on to say: "Catullus suam mulierem vocavit Lesbiam sive Sappho amorem poseos et versus faciendi artem hoc nomine in illa praedicans." That is to say, Clodia was herself interested in composing poetry, and the name "Lesbia" is to be taken as a complimentary reference to this hobby of hers.

But I know no real evidence for such literary pursuits on Clodia's part, and certainly the picture we have of her, either from Catullus or from Cicero, does not lead one to think of her in that light.

It seems, however, to me that a clue to this question may be found in Catullus' own poem 51. Merrill suggests that this was "perhaps the earliest of the poems addressed to Lesbia, and the one which first drew her regard." And it is, as everyone knows, a free translation, for the most part, of a poem by Sappho. Sappho (again as everyone knows) was *par excellence* the poetess of love and passion, pre-eminent among the ancients. How could a lady fail to feel complimented when addressed in words drawn from such a source?

Sappho's verses contain no name, nor have we any evidence as to the identity of the person addressed. But, whoever it was, it was presumably some Lesbian girl to whom the Lesbian poetess directed those passionate verses. May it not have been that Catullus, wishing to adapt this poem for his own purpose, conceived the idea of actually saying to his ladylove, by the use of this name: "You are as fair as the *Lesbian maid* whom Sappho loved, and inspire in me the same emotions which Sappho felt, and so I offer you the same words which Sappho used"?

If any such thoughts were really suggested by this name, it was surely an added graceful compliment and must have pleased Clodia.

ARTHUR H. WESTON

LAWRENCE COLLEGE

 CAESAR *B.G.* ii. 4. 6

"Vinum ad se omnino importari non sinunt, quod ea re ad laborem ferendum remollescere homines atque effeminari arbitrantur." In spite of the prohibition sentiment, this text describing the attitude of the Suebi has long been regarded as a bit unsteady. The school editions content themselves for the most part with observations on the tendency to abstinence among northern peoples, but W. Paul (*Z.f.d.G.*, XXXV, 280), suspecting that there

was an interpolation inspired by *nil pati vini—adferri* (ii. 15. 4),¹ criticized the passage as out of place in its context, and open to objection in language because so common a word as *sinunt* is ἄπ·λεγ, for Caesar. Holder, Dittenberger, Meusel, are among those who follow Paul in deleting the section; others from Nipperdey to Holmes have accepted it unquestioningly, though in a few cases *patiuntur* is adopted from two β MSS.

It is not my purpose to support the sentiment of the passage by pointing out that a priori both the Nervii and the Suebi could have been total abstainers in a region where there was a "tendency to abstinence," nor to bolster up *sinunt* with a list of Caesar's ἄπ·λεγ though there is a small group of these still unassailed by those who would judge such matters mathematically. It is odd, however, that *sinunt* should be attacked while *remollescere* has escaped remark, a word that is both poetic and rare enough to have counted among the *inaudita* that Caesar shunned *tamquam scopulum* (Gellius *Noct. Att.* i. 10. 4). The fact seems to be that Caesar's rare words are usually readily understood from their obvious origin (*potentatu*, i. 31. 4; *irridicule*, i. 42. 6; *absimilis*, iii. 14. 5; *insuefactos*, iv. 24. 4; etc.), while in other instances a second word is added to explain the rare term or to restrict the word of general meaning. The resulting couplets are much in Cicero's style, but are without his sheer *abundantia*. Examples are: *malacia ac tranquillitas*, iii. 15. 3; *servitute et catenis*, v. 27. 2; *exempla cruciatusque*, i. 31. 12; *opus hibernorum munitionesque*, iii. 3. 1; possibly *ambactos clientesque* vi. 12. 6; *animi voluptatisque* v. 12. 6; *lingulis promunturiisque*, iii. 12. 1; etc. The added word in each instance defines the first, or explains the meaning of one that is less common. So in our passage *remollescere* though rare and poetic has an obvious origin, and undoubtedly through the relation of *mollis*, *mulier* (see Walde, *Lat. etymol. Wörterb.*, s.v.; Sommer, *Lat. Laut- u. Formenlehre*, p. 54) led Caesar to use *effeminari* to complete his customary type of couplet. There is thus a distinct mark of Caesar's style in the section, which should clearly help to remove suspicion of its genuineness.

O. F. LONG

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

¹The Caesar references are to *B.G.* throughout.